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WALPOLE'S RELATIONS WITH VOLTAIRE¹

A study of the Walpole-Voltaire correspondence is interesting from the historical point of view chiefly because it shows that in 1768—eight years, that is to say, before the notorious letter² which Voltaire wrote to d'Argental on the publication of Letourneur's translation of Shakespeare—the “apostle and martyr of the English” was already repenting of having introduced the “histrion barbare” to French readers in his *Lettres philosophiques*. It shows us too how the dilettante Walpole was willing to “fight to the death for the superiority of Shakespeare,” and reminds us that it was partly toward this end that he produced his *Castle of Otranto*, a novel in which the sublime and the ridiculous were united in supposedly Shakespearean proportions, and the “deportment of the domestics” was based on the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet*. Further, we can reconstruct by this means the story of the clash between these two kindred spirits, the man of the world dabbling in literature on the one hand, the man of letters posing as a leader of society on the other.

¹ Bibliography:

Correspondance complète de Mme du Deffand avec la Duchesse de Choiseul, l'abbé Barthélemy, et M. Craufurt (ed. le Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire, 3 tom., 1877; orig. ed., 2 tom., 1859; nouv. ed. augm., 1866).

Correspondance complète de la Marquise Du Deffand avec ses amis le Président Hénault, Montesquieu, D'Alembert, Voltaire, Horace Walpole, précédée d'une histoire de sa vie, etc. (ed. M. de Lescure, 2 tom., 1865).

Lettres de la Marquise du Deffand à Horace Walpole, depuis comte d'Orford, écrites dans les années 1766 à 1780; auxquelles sont jointes des lettres de Madame du Deffand à Voltaire, écrites dans les années 1769 à 1775. Publiées d'après les originaux déposés à Strawberry-Hill (nouv. ed., augm. des extraits des lettres d'Horace Walpole, ed. N. T. Artaud, 4 tom., 1824 [this edition is a translation of Miss Berry's edition of 1810]).

Letters of the Marquise Du Deffand to the Hon. Horace Walpole, afterward Earl of Orford, from 1766 to 1780. To which are added Letters of Mme du Deffand to Voltaire from 1769 to 1775. Published from the originals at Strawberry Hill (ed. with a life of the authoress and notes, by Miss Mary Berry, 4 vols., 1810).

Lettres de la Marquise du Deffand à Horace Walpole (1766-1780) (ed. Mrs. Paget Toynbee, 3 tom., 1912).

Correspondance littéraire, philosophique, et critique, par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, etc. (ed. Tournoux, 1877).

Voltaire, *Œuvres* (ed. Beuchot, 1833 [the letters to Walpole are in Vol. LXV]).

Letters of Horace Walpole, Fourth Earl of Orford (ed. Paget Toynbee, 1891).

The Castle of Otranto, by Horace Walpole (2d ed., with Preface, 1767).

Churton Collins, *Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau in England* (1908).

² Voltaire to d'Argental, July 19, 1776; this letter is quoted below, p. 199, n. 5.

Voltaire was a "very" great man, Walpole a sufficiently small one; Voltaire was a cosmopolitan, his antagonist as full of insular prejudices as though he had never crossed the Channel; yet in this instance their motives and their methods of controversy are amusingly similar and equally questionable. In the end, circumstances rather than any merit of his own gave Walpole the *beau rôle* and allowed him to write later a summary account,¹ breathing virtuous disgust in every line; yet the quarrel would never have arisen had he not published some remarks on Voltaire as irrelevant as they were personal.

At this period Walpole was very popular in French society. The son of a prime minister whose policy had given France peace, he was also an Englishman in an age of Anglomania, and the owner of a complete Gothic castle in days when few French landscape gardens possessed anything more imposing than a Cave of Melancholy, or at most, like the Duc de Choiseul's park at Chanteloup, a Pagoda of Friendship. And Strawberry Hill contained too the "Officina Arbuteana," volumes from the presses of which were much sought after in Paris. We hear of gifts to Madame Necker, the Duchesse de Choiseul, the Abbé Barthélemy; of a complete set sent at the request of the librarian to the Royal Library itself. Grimm presents Walpole to the sovereigns of Northern Europe as the son of Sir Robert, the wittiest of Englishmen in Paris, the ill-advised printer of the Président Hénault's worthless *Cornélie*, a martyr to the gout, and—most important of all—the author of "la lettre du roi de Prusse à J-J Rousseau, qui a joué un si grand rôle dans la querelle de David Hume."²

It was this letter which won for Walpole an unusual vogue at the moment of its appearance, and caused him a great deal of annoyance

¹ "About the same time Voltaire published in the *Mercur* the letter he had written to me, but I made no answer, because he had treated me more dirtily than Mr. Hume had. Though Voltaire, with whom I had never had the least acquaintance or correspondence, had voluntarily written to me first and asked for my book [*Historic Doubts on Richard III*], he wrote a letter to the Duchess of Choiseul, in which, without saying a syllable of his having written to me first, he told her I had officiously sent him my *Works*, and declared war with him in defence of *ce bouffon Shakespeare*, whom in his reply to me he had pretended so much to admire. The Duchess sent me Voltaire's letter, which gave me such contempt for his disingenuity that I dropped all correspondence with him" (Walpole, *Short Notes of My Life*, April 24, 1769).

² Grimm, *op. cit.*, July 15, 1768. The Président sent Voltaire a copy of this Strawberry Hill edition of *Cornélie* (Mme du Deffand to Voltaire, July 3, 1768; to Walpole, November 9, 1767).

six months later. He wrote it at Paris in January, 1766, by way of ridiculing the affectations of Rousseau, who had just passed through the city with Hume, on his "flight" to England. The persecution to which he imagined he was subjected, and the martyrdom he seemed thirsting to endure, had provoked universal interest, though anything but universal sympathy. Walpole's not very witty *jeu d'esprit*¹ thus made him the fashion for the moment,² and when that fashion showed signs of dying a natural death it was revived by the quarrel between Rousseau and Hume, which, thanks to Grimm's *Correspondance*, Suard's *Exposé*, Hume's *Concise and Genuine Account*, Walpole's *Narrative*, and countless other pamphlets, prevented Voltaire, like the rest of Europe, from not knowing the name of Hume's "accomplice."³

It is thus not at all surprising that Voltaire should have wished to know more of the Englishman who had been teasing one of the blackest of his *bêtes noires*. He was too a genuinely devoted friend of Walpole's correspondent, Mme du Deffand; he owed to her relative Choiseul, another of Walpole's admirers, the prosperity of his manufactures at Ferney; he seems to have met Sir Robert during his stay in England (1726-29); his relations with the circle of Grimm and D'Alembert suggest that he knew most of what went

¹ *Le Roi de Prusse à Monsieur Rousseau.*

"MON CHER JEAN-JACQUES,

"Vous avez renoncé à Genève votre patrie; vous vous êtes fait chasser de la Suisse, pays tant vanté dans vos écrits; la France vous a décrété. Venez donc chez moi; j'admire vos talens; je m'amuse de vos rêveries, qui (soit dit en passant) vous occupent trop, et trop long tems. Il faut à la fin être sage et heureux. Vous avez assez fait parler de vous par des singularités peu convenables à un véritable grand homme. Démontrez à vos ennemis que vous pouvez avoir quelquefois le sens commun: cela les fâchera, sans vous faire tort. Mes états vous offrent une retraite paisible; je vous veux du bien, et je vous en ferai, si vous le trouvez bon. Mais si vous vous obstinez à rejeter mon secours, attendez-vous que je ne le dirai à personne. Si vous persistez à vous creuser l'esprit pour trouver de nouveaux malheurs, choisissez-les tels que vous voudrez. Je suis roi, je puis vous en procurer au gré de vos souhaits: et ce qui sûrement ne vous arrivera pas vis à vis de vos ennemis, je cesserai de vous persécuter quand vous cesserez de mettre votre gloire à l'être.

"Votre bon ami,
"FRÉDÉRIC"

² See his letters to Conway, January 12, 1766; Chute, January 15, 1766; Gray, January 25, 1766.

³ A full account of the dispute appears in Churton Collins, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-41. Walpole's letters to Hume (July 26, November 1 and 11, 1766) show him adopting, as he did in his *Narrative*, an attitude of well-bred contempt for all mere scribblers and *philosophes*; he cannot, however, conceal his annoyance at D'Alembert's having been offended that Rousseau should have attributed the letter of the King of Prussia to himself (D'Alembert).

into the *Correspondance littéraire*. The pretext on which he addressed Walpole we know; as to the motive we can hazard a plausible guess. He writes then to congratulate the author of the *Historic Doubts on Richard III* on having adopted an attitude of skepticism in treating of his subject—an attitude which he, Voltaire, has long been preaching as the only safe one for the historian to adopt.¹ Perhaps Walpole will be so kind as to send him a copy of the book itself, though the only claim he can urge is his desire to instruct himself further.

So far so good; but in 1767 there had appeared a French translation of *The Castle of Otranto*, a poor one according to Walpole,² though Grimm³ praises the elegance and correctness of the translator, *l'infatigable M. Eidous—le fatal M. Eidous*, as he calls him in less flattering vein elsewhere. Grimm hardly knew what to make of the story itself; he found it difficult to admire, but succeeded in explaining the fact away with the one reflection which of all others was most calculated to rouse the wrath of the lord of Ferney—"il ne faut pas juger les ouvrages de M. Walpole comme ceux d'un écrivain de profession, mais comme des objets d'amusement et de délassement d'un homme de qualité." Even a philosopher, he continues, could not but shudder at the monstrous helmet, the giant sword, the walking picture, the hermit's skeleton, though "il est vrai que, quand on a lu cela, il n'en résulte pas grand'chose."⁴

It was from the Preface attached to the second edition that great things did result, as both Grimm and Mme du Deffand had from the beginning prophesied that they would.⁵ Walpole replied to his old friend's remonstrances with a warm defense of his *Castle*—"de

¹ "Il y a cinquante ans, que j'ai fait vœu de douter. J'ose vous supplier, Monsieur, de m'aider à accomplir mon vœu! Je vous suis peut-être inconnu, quoique j'aie été honoré autrefois de l'amitié of the too brother [i.e., of Sir Robert and his brother *old Horace*]" (Voltaire to Walpole, June 6, 1768).

² *Short Notes of My Life* (March, 1767).

³ Grimm, *op. cit.*, letter of February 15, 1767.

⁴ The British Museum copy of the second edition has pasted inside the cover a cutting from the *St. James' Chronicle*, which gives the English view—a piece of verse to the author signed "Philotrantus." The second stanza runs:

"By thee decoy'd, with curious Fear
We tread thy *Castle's* dreary Round;
Though horrid all we see and hear,
Thy Horrors charm while they confound."

⁵ "J'aurais voulu qu'on eût supprimé la préface ... il y est lu que Shakespeare a beaucoup plus d'esprit que Voltaire; ce trait vous met à l'abri de la critique de Fréron, mais ne peut manquer de vous en attirer bien d'autres" (Mme du Deffand to Walpole, March 8, 1767).

tous mes ouvrages ... l'unique où je me sois plu"—which will, he is convinced, find admirers enough when the reign of taste shall supersede that of philosophy. As for Voltaire, he seeks no quarrel with him, but he will maintain to the death the superiority of Shakespeare.¹

A study of the Preface itself hardly bears out these pacific assurances. Walpole begins by explaining that his novel was "an attempt to blend the two kinds of Romance, the ancient and the modern. . . . My rule was Nature. . . . That great master of nature, *Shakespeare*, was the model I copied." It is from the speeches of the gravediggers in *Hamlet*, the rough jests of the citizens in *Julius Caesar* that he has learned how a contrast between the sublimity of the heroes and the naïveté of the servants will enhance the effect of the whole. But—and we feel at once how forced is the transition and how unnecessary the reference—Voltaire declares, in his edition of Corneille, that this mixture of buffoonery and solemnity is intolerable; well, "Voltaire is a genius—but not of Shakespeare's magnitude." To refute him, Walpole will appeal to his own opinions, expressed when he was speaking without prejudice. In the Preface to the *Enfant Prodigue* ("that exquisite piece of which I declare my admiration, and which, should I live twenty years longer, I trust I shall never attempt to ridicule"²), he says of comedy: "On y voit un mélange de sérieux et de plaisanterie"; and surely this must apply to tragedy equally well. Again, "in his epistle to Maffei, prefixed to *Mérope*, he delivers almost the same opinion, though I doubt not with a little irony."

This, though unnecessary, is not offensive; we may wonder what Voltaire is doing in this galley, but, renouncing the attempt to discover how he came there, we must agree that his captor has treated him with all due courtesy. Not so in the footnotes, however; Walpole's pages, like Gibbon's, carry their sting in their tail. "The following remark," he has the grace to admit, "is foreign to the present

¹ This reply to Mme du Deffand's letter of March 8 is quoted by Miss Berry in a note to her edition of the *Letters of Mme du Deffand*. Walpole, afraid of the publication of his letters to Mme du Deffand, had insisted on her returning or destroying them; she burned many in 1778; the rest she had sent to England by Conway in 1775. These last were apparently destroyed by Miss Berry in accordance with Walpole's will.

² This is a hit at Voltaire's change of opinion over Shakespeare. "The French critic has twice translated the same speech ['To be or not to be'] from *Hamlet*, some years ago in admiration, latterly in derision; and I am sorry to find that his judgment grows weaker, when it ought to be farther matured."

question"—but this does not prevent him from making it. May not "the severe criticisms of so masterly a writer as *Voltaire* on our immortal countryman" have been "the effusions of wit and precipitation, rather than the result of judgment and attention? May not the critic's skill in the force and powers of our language have been as incorrect and incompetent as his knowledge of our history? Of the latter his own pen has dropped glaring evidence."¹ Walpole too, we see, could on occasion be "a venomous insect."

Such was the Preface. It seems difficult to believe that *Voltaire* had not heard of it; *Mme du Deffand's* circle, which included many of his correspondents, was discussing it with dismay, Grimm had called special attention to it in reviewing *Eidous'* translation, and, even supposing that his dearest friends had preferred not to hurt his feelings by referring to it, his dearest enemies, and they were many, were no doubt enchanted to repair the omission. What more natural than that *Voltaire*, ever quick to resent a fancied insult, much more such a real one as the Preface contained, should have used his slight though perhaps genuine interest in *Richard III* as a pretext for joining battle with its author about this later work?

Whatever *Voltaire's* motive in writing the letter on *Richard III*, we may imagine the very mixed feelings with which Walpole received it. His reply² is certainly a masterpiece of tact, even down to the delicate flattery implied by his writing it in English, not to mention many compliments of a more direct and even fulsome nature.

Without knowing it, you have been my master, and perhaps the sole merit in my writings is owing to my having studied yours; so far, Sir, am I from living in that state of barbarism and ignorance with which you tax me when you say *que vous m'êtes peut-être inconnu*. I was not a stranger to your reputation very many years ago, but remember to have then thought you honoured our house by dining with our mother—though I was at school, and had not the happiness of seeing you.

Then, after more general remarks, comes his confession; in the Preface to "a trifling romance, much unworthy of [his] regard," he has found fault with some of *Voltaire's* remarks on Shakespeare.

¹ The "evidence" could not well be more trivial. In his Preface to Thomas Corneille's *Essex*, *Voltaire* shows that he does not realize that the Earl of Leicester and Dudley were the same person.

² June 21, 1768.

This romance he now proposes to send, and very cleverly does he adopt the pose of the bluff and magnanimous Briton in doing so.

I might retract, I might beg your pardon; but having said nothing but what I thought, nothing illiberal or unbecoming a gentleman, it would be treating you with ingratitude and impertinence, to suppose that you would either be offended with my remarks, or pleased with my recantation. You are as much above wanting flattery, as I am above offering it to you.

By the same courier, Walpole wrote in much perplexity to Mme du Deffand. His letter is of course lost, but we can judge of its contents by the reply.¹ No, says his mentor, he was right in not speaking of his part in the Hume-Rousseau affair;² and yes, he was right in confessing to the Preface: "Je viens de me la faire relire, elle est terrible; il n'est pas vraisemblable qu'il l'ignore; mais s'il l'ignorait, il l'apprendrait un jour, et en ce cas il est bon de le prévenir: il y a de la noblesse et de la franchise dans ce procédé." But, adds this shrewd old tactician, having confessed that the Preface exists, why force Voltaire to read it? Why not quietly forget to send it? Above all, why run the risk of entering upon an interminable literary quarrel?³ She wrote too to Mme de Choiseul at Chanteloup, asking advice and sending copies of the letters, seeking thus to enlist a powerful ally in the coming dispute.⁴

Voltaire's reply, an *Art poétique* in little, was written on July 15. He praises *Richard III*,⁵ but devotes most of his attention to the questions raised in the Preface, though he nowhere mentions it by name and only in one or two instances replies to it point by point.

¹ Letter of June 28, 1768.

² Voltaire already knew of it from D'Alembert, who wrote on August 11, 1766.

³ "Il me vient à l'esprit que, n'ayant rien à faire, il ne serait pas fâché de vous attirer à une correspondance littéraire, qui se tournerait en discussion, en dispute, et lui donnerait l'occasion de se venger de vous. Vous avez décidé que Shakespeare avait plus d'esprit que lui: croyez-vous qu'il le pardonne? C'est tout ce que je peux faire, moi, de vous le pardonner."

⁴ "Je trouve la franchise de M. Walpole envers Voltaire extrêmement noble. ... mais pourquoi me dites-vous: *Ne vous détachez pas de notre ami?* Vous savez combien je suis disposée à aimer tous ceux qui vous aiment, et celui-là plus qu'aucun autre, parce que son personnel me plaît infiniment et que j'ai très-bonne opinion de son cœur et de son âme" (Mme de Choiseul to Mme du Deffand, July 6, 1768).

⁵ "Vous seriez un excellent *attorney-general*. Vous pesez toutes les probabilités; mais il paraît que vous avez une inclination secrète pour ce bossu. ... Je veux croire avec vous que Richard III n'était ni si laid ni si méchant qu'on le dit; mais je n'aurais pas voulu avoir affaire à lui. Votre *rose blanche* et votre *rose rouge* avaient de terribles épines pour la nation."

Walpole, he not unreasonably complains, has tried to make the English believe that he despises Shakespeare:

Je suis le premier qui aie fait connaître Shakespeare aux Français. ... J'ai été persécuté pendant trente ans par une nuée de fanatiques, pour avoir dit que Locke est l'Hercule de la métaphysique. ... Ma destinée a encore voulu que je fusse le premier qui aie expliqué à mes concitoyens les découvertes du grand Newton. ... J'ai été votre apôtre et votre martyr; en vérité il n'est pas juste que les Anglais se plaignent de moi.

For many years, he protests, he has been maintaining that Shakespeare's genius was his own, while his faults were those of his period—"c'est le chaos de la tragédie, dans lequel il y a cent traits de lumière." He admits that he has advocated, as Walpole declares, a mixture of the serious and the comic in comedy; even that he has said that "tous les genres sont bons, hors le genre ennuyeux." Granted: "mais la grossièreté n'est pas un genre," and this even the Spaniards are beginning to see. As to the unities, "vous n'observez, vous autres libres Bretons, ni unité de lieu, ni unité de temps, ni unité d'action"—and the plays which result are none the better for it.

Walpole had attacked in his Preface the occasional flatness of the style of Racine; Voltaire broadens the question by the sweeping nature of his reply. Paris, he declares, is far superior to Athens for comedy and tragedy alike: in the former, Molière and even Regnard have surpassed Aristophanes, while "toutes les tragédies grecques me paraissent des ouvrages d'écoliers, en comparaison des *sublimes scènes* de Corneille, et des *parfaites tragédies* de Racine." And the standard of taste is higher in Paris than at Athens; there the theater-going public never exceeded ten thousand, and that including the lower classes; here, above thirty thousand souls, all of them men and women of culture, delight in the works of our great masters.

Walpole's last stricture had dealt with the French use of rhyme; but, says Voltaire, Dryden used it, so why not Corneille and Racine? "C'est une difficulté de plus." And he settles or evades the whole question with one of those anecdotes that are true to life if not to fact:

Je demandais un jour à Pope pourquoi Milton n'avait pas rimé son poème, dans le temps que les autres poètes rimaient leurs poèmes, à l'imitation des Italiens; il me répondit: *Because he could not.*

And so, with a graceful compliment that ought to have made the conscience-stricken Walpole wish he had never mentioned those twin brethren, the Earl of Leicester and Dudley, the letter ends.

But now for the *tracasserie* that one comes to regard as almost inevitable in Voltaire's "little wars." He is evidently out to make mischief or at least to make a noise; accordingly, instead of sending his letter direct to Walpole, he sends it to Mme de Choiseul, who will pass it on to Mme du Deffand, who will finally send it to England—at every stage in its journey, then, it will be read, admired, discussed; and Voltaire sees in the discussion the germs of a very pretty little international dispute. To make assurance doubly sure, he sends Mme de Choiseul his own version of the affair,¹ not knowing, one imagines, that she had already been shown all the pieces of evidence by Mme du Deffand. It certainly cannot have occurred to him that she would take the drastic course of sending Walpole his letter to her, together with the long, full-dress letter it had covered.

There can be no doubt now, writes Mme du Deffand,² as to the intentions of Voltaire, and she repeats the advice she had given a month before.

Au nom de Dieu, ne donnez point dans ce panneau; tirez-vous de cette affaire le plus poliment qu'il vous sera possible, mais évitez la guerre; c'est le sentiment et le conseil de la grand' maman [Mme de Choiseul]; c'est celui du grand abbé [Barthélemy], et par-dessus tout, c'est le mien; je suis bien sûre aussi que ce sera le vôtre.

It was; the Choiseul letter shocked Walpole as much as his friends had anticipated—all the more, no doubt, because he himself had not found it easy to be straightforward with this treacherous antagonist.³

¹ "MADAME,

"La femme du protecteur est protectrice. La femme du ministre de la France pourra prendre le parti des Français contre les Anglais avec qui je suis en guerre. Daignez juger, Madame, entre M. Walpole et moi. Il m'a envoyé ses ouvrages dans lesquels il justifie le tyran Richard trois, dont ni vous ni moi ne nous soucions guère. Mais il donne la préférence à son grossier bouffon de Shakespeare sur Racine et sur Corneille, et c'est de quoi je me soucie beaucoup.

"Je ne sais par quelle voie M. Walpole m'a envoyé sa déclaration de guerre. Il faut que ce soit par M. le Duc de Choiseul, car elle est très-spirituelle et très-polie. Si vous voulez, Madame, être médiatrice de la paix, il ne tient qu'à vous; j'en passerai par ce que vous ordonnerez; je vous supplie d'être juge du combat. ...

"Vous me trouverez bien hardi, mais vous pardonnerez à un vieux soldat qui combat pour sa patrie, et qui, s'il a du goût, aura combattu sous vos ordres."

² Letter of July 21, 1768.

³ Walpole's reply to Mme du Deffand's letter of July 21, quoted by Miss Berry, says: "Vous voyez la bonne foi de cet homme-là! Il me recherche, il me demande mon *Richard*, et puis il parle comme si je m'étais intrigué à le lui faire lire. Sa vanité est blessée de ce qu'on a osé lui donner un rival, et il a la faiblesse plus grande encore de vouloir le rejeter sur la part qu'il prend à l'honneur de Corneille et de Racine."

Accordingly he replies in a tone of ironical and overwhelming politeness, thanking Voltaire for his letter, but declining further controversy.

One can never, Sir, be sorry to have been in the wrong, when one's errors are pointed out to one in so obliging and masterly a manner. Whatever opinion I may have of Shakespeare, I should think him to blame, if he could have seen the letter you have done me the honour to write to me, and yet not conform to the rules you have there laid down. When he lived, there had not been a Voltaire both to give laws to the stage, and to show on what good sense those laws were founded. . . . But I will say no more on this head; for I am neither so unpolished as to tell you to your face how much I admire you, nor, though I have taken the liberty to vindicate Shakespeare against your criticisms, am I vain enough to think myself an adversary worthy of you. I am more proud of receiving laws from you than of contesting them.¹

With his letter to Mme de Choiseul, Voltaire had even worse luck. She sent no direct reply at all,² and it was left for Mme du Deffand to try to patch up a peace in which neither she herself nor any of those concerned believed.

Though she had agreed with Walpole in condemning Voltaire's letter to Mme de Choiseul, she had enthusiastically praised the letter to Walpole himself,³ and had refused to commit herself as to the rights of the case beyond temporizing with, "*Tout ce que je sais, c'est que Voltaire a raison et que vous n'avez pas tort.*"⁴ Thus it was that when the Maréchale de Luxembourg sent her a complete set of Voltaire's new quarto edition she was able to reply with not more than the average amount of insincerity, praising the answer to the Preface as "a masterpiece of taste, good sense, wit, eloquence, politeness, etc." But she was improvising rather too freely when she continued:

M. de Walpole est bien converti: il faut lui pardonner ses erreurs passées. L'orgueil national est grand dans les Anglais; ils ont de la peine à nous

¹ Letter of July 27, 1768.

² "Je crois que nous ferons bien de le laisser tranquille, car pour moi, je ne veux point entrer dans une dispute littéraire. Je ne me sens pas en état de tenir tête à Voltaire, puis l'animadversion des gens de lettres me paraît la plus dangereuses des pestes" (Mme de Choiseul to Mme du Deffand, August 7, 1768). Cf. Mme du Deffand's letter to Walpole, July 27, 1768, which speaks of "la réponse indirecte qu'elle lui avait faite en m'écrivant."

³ "C'est le dieu du style" (letter to Walpole of August 10, 1768).

⁴ Letter to Walpole of August 23, 1768.

accorder la supériorité dans les choses de goût, tandis que sans vous nous reconnâtrions en eux toute supériorité dans les choses de raisonnement.¹

So far from Walpole's being converted, this very letter—one of those brought to Strawberry Hill after Mme du Deffand's death in 1780—bears a pencil note in his own hand to contradict this statement, and adding that had he known he would certainly not have allowed his well-meaning old friend to make it.

Mme du Deffand was, however, knocking at an open door. On this occasion at least Voltaire seems to have borne no malice, possibly because he was fully occupied at the moment by a very similar feud with the Président Hénault.² Like a true philosopher, he turned the affair to practical use, and quotes the *Historic Doubts* in two of his works.³

Walpole took things more seriously: he could forgive neither Voltaire's criticism of Shakespeare nor Voltaire's conduct toward himself. Accordingly, when Lady Ossory sent him a copy of one of these "honourable mentions," we find him coldly replying:

I saw long ago the passage your Ladyship took the trouble to transcribe. To be cited so honourably by Voltaire would be flattering indeed, if he had not out of envy taken pains to depreciate all the really great authors of his own country, and of this; and what sort of judgment is that which decries Shakespeare and commends me?⁴

His indignation on reading Voltaire's letter to d'Argental⁵ on Letourneur's Shakespeare was extreme; he sends to Mason this "paltry

¹ Letter to Voltaire of August 14, 1768.

² Mme du Deffand to Walpole, October 5, 1768; Voltaire to Mme du Deffand, January 4, 1769.

³ He says in his Preface to *Don Pèdre* (a tragedy finished in 1774, though begun much earlier, in which he takes the part of Pedro the Cruel of Castile against Henry of Trastámara): "Il ne faut pas s'étonner après cela si les historiens ont pris le parti du vainqueur contre le vaincu. Ceux qui ont écrit l'histoire en Espagne et en France n'ont pas été des Tacites; et M. Horace Walpole, envoyé d'Angleterre en Espagne [he is confusing the "noble author" with his uncle Horace, Lord Walpole] a eu bien raison de dire dans ses *Doutes sur Richard III*, comme nous l'avons remarqué ailleurs: 'Quand un roi heureux accuse ses ennemis, tous les historiens s'empressent de lui servir de témoins.' " Voltaire quotes the same maxim in *Le Pyrrhonisme dans l'histoire*, chap. xvii (1768). In his *Essai sur les mœurs* (definitive edition, 1756), he had already mentioned "l'ingénieux M. Walpole" when giving his account of the Wars of the Roses, in chaps. cxvi and cxvii.

⁴ Letter to Lady Ossory, January 7, 1777.

⁵ "Auriez-vous lu deux volumes misérables dans lesquels il [Letourneur] veut faire regarder Shakespeare comme le seul modèle de la véritable tragédie? Il l'appelle le Dieu du Théâtre... il ne daigne pas nommer Corneille ou Racine: ces deux grands hommes sont seulement enveloppés dans la proscription générale sans que leurs noms soient prononcés. Il y a déjà deux tomes d'imprimés de ce Shakespeare, qu'on prendrait pour des pièces de la Foire, faites il y a deux cents ans. ... Ce qu'il y a d'affreux, c'est que le monstre a un parti en France, et pour comble de calamités, et d'horreur, c'est moi qui autrefois parlai le premier de ce Shakespeare; c'est moi qui le premier montrai aux Français quelques perles que j'avais trouvées dans son énorme fumier, etc." (letter of July 19, 1776).

scurrilous letter against Shakespeare, but it is not worth sending"; and explains: "I have a mind to provoke you, and so I send you this silly torrent of ribaldry. May the spirit of Pope that dictated your 'Musæus,' animate you to punish this worst of dunces, a genius turned fool with envy."¹

The last of his references to Voltaire shows him still mindful of the ancient grudge:

I . . . was much pleased with the sight of both the letters of Voltaire and Mr. Windham. . . . Both are curious in different ways. Voltaire's English would be good English in any other foreigner; but a man who gave himself the air of criticising our—and I will say the world's—greatest author, ought to have been a better master of our language, though this letter and his commentary prove that he could neither write it nor read it accurately and intelligently.²

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¹ Letter to Mason, September 17, 1776.

² Letter to Warton, December 9, 1784.